

NORMAN DOUGLAS

D. H. LAWRENCE

AND

MAURICE MAGNUS

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A PLEA FOR BETTER MANNERS

By NORMAN DOUGLAS

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D. H. Lawrence and M. Magnus

A PLEA FOR BETTER MANNERS.

Some kind person, with belated thoughtfulness, has just sent me a short article from the London *Outlook* of 1 November, wherein I find myself mentioned in connection with those recently published "Memoirs of a Private in the Foreign Legion" to which D. H. Lawrence has supplied an Introduction. The writer of the article opines that the "N. D." depicted by Lawrence must be myself.

Is it?

Why, of course it is. There is no mistaking that "wicked red face", those shabby clothes coupled with the bluff, grandiose manner of what may once have been a gentleman. I should recognize myself at a mile's distance, especially knowing, as I do, friend Lawrence's idiosyncracies in the matter of portraiture; what he contrives to see and what he fails to see; or rather, what he makes a point of seeing, and what he makes a point of not seeing. For he is not congenitally blind; he is only blind when it suits his convenience. He sees, for instance, that after a certain

dinner I ask the waiter to weigh the remaining wine and take its price off the bill—which makes me look a little mean (quite a gentlemanly trait, nowadays); he fails to see that in restaurants of this class wine is invariably sold by weight, and that the man who does not act as I did is held to be weak in the head. He also sees that I don't believe in opening windows on November evenings—in other words, that I am a nitrogen-maniac; he does not see that nitrogen is an antidote to sleeplessness, that a healthy man gets quite enough fresh air out of doors without cramming his house full of the stuff and that, in fact, this whole oxygen-cult is nothing but humbug and, in the winter months, downright lunacy.

I have no fault to find with this travesty of myself; no fault whatever; it is perfectly legitimate fooling and my young friend might have presented me in far less engaging fashion, since I gave him permission to "put me in as you please." He might have—well, there is no knowing what he might not have done or what he may not yet do, if the impish mood is upon him. Altogether; capital reading, Lawrence's Introduction, although in places not only incorrect but woefully wrongheaded; indeed, a masterpiece of unconscious misrepresentation. I hope it will help to sell the

book; I hope that I, who am entitled to half the proceeds, will in due course receive something on account. But he has not been fair to Maurice Magnus, the Private whose Memoirs are here published; and I am inclined to agree with the writer of the *Outlook* article who on the strength of some information received—both the writer and his informant are unknown to me—says that far from being a “scamp and a treacherous little devil,” as described by Lawrence, Magnus was “not only a brave man, but one who was witty and amusing and most likeable.”....

All this is awkward. One hates thrusting oneself forward in a matter of this kind; it smacks of bad form, and life is already too full of unnecessary personalities. But I am dragged into the business by name and there seems to be no way out of it, especially as, being Maurice’s literary executor, I have received letters from several people asking what I am going to do about it. You knew him well, they say. Was he really as much of a “bounder” as Lawrence makes out? Can’t you tell us the truth?

I wish I could. I suffer under a double drawback. In the first place, I like to taste my friends but not to eat them; in other words, I hold the old-fashioned view that all interro-

gation, all social curiosity, is vulgar and therefore to be avoided; the consequence being that, in the present case, I know practically nothing about his past, having never asked anything. Next, I have been unable to obtain access to those papers which he left me at his death and which might allow me to write some kind of a sketch of his feverishly restless existence. I have seen these papers, a suit-case full of them; they consist of family documents and diaries; literary material of many kinds; letters from important persons in every walk of life, musical and theatrical celebrities beginning with Paderewski, Sarah Bernhardt, Duse; American millionaires, Russian Grand Dukes, a crowned head or two (only Balkans, I fear) etc. etc, I have seen them. That is all.

Now, at the risk of being long-winded, I will try to straighten this affair out definitely. On learning of his suicide, I applied for these papers, including the Foreign Legion Memoirs, to the gentleman in Malta whom Lawrence calls Mr. Mazzaiba in whose possession they then were and presumably still are: with negative results. And this in spite of a memorandum written by Magnus shortly before his death (quoted by Lawrence on p. 83) which contains words to this effect: "My literary executor Norman Douglas (address).... All

manuscripts and books for Norman Douglas. . . . I leave my literary property to Norman Douglas to whom half of the results are to accrue—the other half my debts are to be paid with." That strikes me as plain speaking. Magnus being an American citizen, I next applied to his Consul in Malta on December 22, 1920. I wrote: "Regarding the literary materials of Mr. Magnus, I suppose they had better be sent here (to Mentone). I may be able to dispose of some of his manuscripts and would hand over the proceeds towards the settlement of his accounts." The Consul thought my suggestion "very reasonable and, under ordinary circumstances, the obvious thing to do." There were difficulties, however—difficulties I shall not enter upon here, since my only desire is to draw attention to what were Magnus' clear wishes on the subject of these papers. And that this memorandum was not a sudden after-thought on his part is proved by a letter to me, dated 4 May, 1920, in which he says: "I leave all my manuscripts and papers to you—and their proceeds." He also once gave me the following document, imploring me to keep it in some safe place:

"Rome, Nov. 26, 1919.

"In case of my death all my literary material and letters, at present in N. C's studio in 33

Via... Rome, shall go to Norman Douglas without any reservation. Maurice Magnus."

Now I can understand his poor little personal effects—his silver card case, 3 razors, 1 soft felt hat, 1 frying pan, 1 rubber bath and so forth: the whole of them inventoried officially and valued at seventy-five dollars—I can understand these things being retained in Malta with a view to paying his debts. But literary property classified as "one old leather suit-case containing manuscripts and a carton envelope containing photographs" hardly comes under the same category.

Are the wishes of this dead man ever going to be respected?

It was on Capri that I first spoke to Magnus. I happen to know the exact date—Sunday, 22 August, 1909. I know it because I had fixed to leave, and did leave, that same evening for the mountains of the Abruzzi. Somewhere about midday a slender—yes, he was slender at that time—and immaculately dressed young man came up to me and, after introducing himself, began politely, very politely, to ask for a small loan of money. There was something childlike and forlorn about him. His manner was ingratiating but not cringing; an

unaffected, offhand manner, as if he spoke about the weather or the latest scandal.

“My dear Sir,” I said, “you have just come to the right person for a loan. And who is the damned idiot that recommended you to apply to me?”

Nobody, he vowed. He did not know any one on the island. That was just it! If he only had some friend in the place, he would probably not have ventured.... But he had noticed me once or twice in the street, and I looked so “kind” that.... oh, quite a small matter, only a few francs, sufficient to enable him to run over to the mainland where he was expecting remittances which must have arrived from New York by this time. He would cash them in Naples (there was no bank on Capri in those days) in order to return here and settle up his affairs before leaving for America. Couldn’t I manage it?

I said :

“I wish the devil I didn’t look so kind. Anyhow, you won’t get me to lend you money; I never do. It makes enemies.”

“Dear, dear—”

“But I have been known to give, on occasion. Let me see—” pulling out my pocket-book grumblingly and counting up all I could

spare—"would thirty-seven francs meet the case?"

It was enough, he declared. Nearly one pound ten; it was more than enough! Then, after some further protestations:

"Can you really spare it?"

"Of course I can't. But I suppose I shall have to."

"I'll never forget your kindness," he said.

In the same month of August once more, the August of 1917, we met again. He had meanwhile faded out of my memory. The same fastidiously dressed personage stopped me in the Corso in Rome, re-introduced himself and reminded me of those miserable thirty-seven francs, adding: "And now you must let me do something for you in return, if I can; you really must."

"I wouldn't prevent you for worlds," I said.

He was pretty flush just then, and I on my beam ends and altogether run down. He installed me in his apartment, cleared out of his own bedroom and gave it to me, bought me an new outfit and fed me like a prince. There I stayed, putting on flesh again; and I

have only to add that from that day onwards till his death there was nothing he would not do for me; he seemed to delight in anticipating my smallest wishes. If this be what Lawrence calls an ungrateful nature, it is the kind of ingratitude I can still put up with. I observe my young friend is inclined to poke fun at Maurice's continued devotion to me in the year 1919; how he ran my errands, "indulged and spoilt me in every way" and so forth. Let him. I think it creditable to myself. Lucky the man, I say, who can inspire such a deep and lasting affection. Then he proceeds to say that I *despised* him. This is going too far; in fact, it is sheer bunkum—the novelist's touch, about which I may have something to say later on. One does not consort with people whom one despises; one does not despise people who show one a thousand kindnesses. In a book called *Alone* (p. 134) I already spoke of him as "that most charming of persons", and I never had occasion to change that opinion. Several of my letters to him were returned to me unopened by the Malta post-office after his death; I find I wrote him, unaware that this had already occurred, on the 6, 8, 14 and 15 of November 1920. Catch me keeping up such a correspondence with a person whom I despise! And so much for this little absurdity.

At this time he had just begun writing the Memoirs of the Foreign Legion which have led me into this disquisition. I never saw these Memoirs in their subsequent shape—in proof or even in typescript: they were then growing up slowly in manuscript, and the title he had chosen was "DREGS", a most appropriate one which recurs in the text itself and which has been changed for reasons I cannot fathom. He used to work very hard both then and at subsequent periods of his life. It was his peculiar and insane habit to get up every morning at about 4.30; he then had a bath and a shave, made his own tea and dressed himself in that costume like "a little pontiff" which Lawrence has so admirably described (I commend this short paragraph to those simpletons who say that friend Lawrence cannot write; it is a perfect etching—not a stroke too much or too little; there he is, "M. M." in matutinal garb, once and for ever). That done, he sat down at his writing-table and got through an ordinary man's daily task while most of us were still in our beds. His zest of work was prodigious, terrific, non-European; it proved him to be what he was, an American; moreover, he gave you the impression of really liking it—a state of affairs which has always been unintelligible to me, who never did a

stroke save under the lash of what I considered to be necessity.

At eleven or thereabouts he rose from the table which was now strewn with fresh manuscripts and letters to correspondents in every corner of the world, twenty or thirty of them done every morning. By this time he was rather tired and played out, rather "yellowish under the eyes" as Lawrence picturesquely puts it and ready—no wonder!—for a pick-me-up in the shape of a drop of whisky. He fancied, I regret to say, a potent American brand whose name has escaped me. Being partial, myself, to the Scotch or Irish varieties, I used to taunt him with this perverse form of patriotism in the hope of bringing him round to my view and getting whisky more to my own taste; he was adamant; nothing would induce him to abate his national fervour in this respect and therefore, as I did not want him to be everlastingly buying special bottles for me, I finally grew reconciled to the transatlantic stuff and learned to like it almost as well as he did. The sacrifices one makes for one's friends!

Sometimes, again, he interrupted his work in order to attend early Mass, since he felt utterly wretched without such periodical doses of

anthropomorphism. Then he would return home, beaming all over, and say :

“ I prayed ten minutes for your happiness just now.”

“ Very thoughtful of you, my dear boy. Though I can’t say I feel any the better for it.”

“ You will, you will ! ”

“ Possibly. But I always prefer to take these things in ready cash. Then you know where you are.”

“ You can’t imagine how it hurts me, when you talk like that.”

I could imagine it perfectly well. But it did him good to be reminded that not everybody was a R. C. convert ; that not everybody could endure reading the Lives of the Saints and the sickly Thomas à Kempis of whom he was so fond. Often I recommended Nietzsche as a counter-irritant. That gospel would have worked wonders on his assimilative mind. He would not touch the book ; perhaps it is on the Index, where I think it ought to be.

Now Lawrence, in the paragraph I have mentioned and in others, speaks of his cut-glass bottles and silver-studded suit-cases and pomades and powders and all the rest of it. This is quite correct. He was finicky and fussy and fastidious to a degree, especially

about his wearing apparel ; he never used any save the finest cambric handkerchiefs and once presented me with a dozen of them, urging me not to send them to a laundry but to wash them myself, as he did. He made a fine art, almost a religion, of the folding-up and general conservation of clothes, with the consequence that during the first days I passed in his place I had prodigious fun with him. He used to bring breakfast to my bedside at a reasonable hour—say, 7.30—on a wonderful little tray, and then look round despondingly and remark :

“ Rather a mess in here. I’d like to tidy the room a bit, if you don’t mind, before the man comes in. Where are all your clothes ? ”

“ They must be somewhere.”

“ Good gracious ! Here’s your shirt on the window-sill. And your trousers hanging to the top of the wardrobe. Don’t you know that trousers ought to be folded up every evening ? Why have you turned them inside out ? ”

“ I suppose they came off easier that way.”

“ Where are your socks ? ”

“ You might look under the bed.”

“ They’re not there. Just try to think what you did with them. Do try.”

“ I know. I left them on the hall table.”

“ What on earth made you put them there ? ”

“Can’t think. Perhaps I began undressing outside.”

“Dear, dear. This is awful. Were you never taught to arrange your clothes before going to bed?”

“I wasn’t brought up so fussily.”

“And there’s only one boot. Where’s the other one?”

“I haven’t the faintest idea. Please don’t bother about the damned thing. You’re putting me off my breakfast.”

“I mean to find that boot.”

Then he would disappear for a while, and come back in despair.

“Half my morning wasted! And your boot is nowhere to be found.”

“I remember now. In the medicine-chest...”

I imagine that his refinements in the matter of toilette, and also of cookery, were due to the fact that he was an only son, brought up by an adoring mother and almost continually in her company to the day of her death (she died of cancer) — that is, up to his own *thirtysixth* year. I wish I could relate something about this mother who in his eyes was a kind of sacred creature — his “great stunt,” Lawrence calls her — but a regrettable incuriosity of mine has prevented me from learning anything of importance save that she was an illegitimate

daughter of old William of Prussia (hence the inscription on her tombstone in Rome: *Filia regis*). It is true that he began to talk about her once or twice, but his voice at once took on such tremulously tender accents that I lost no time in changing the conversation. I gathered, however, that there was a bond of more than common affection between the two, that they were everything to each other, and that her death was the tragedy of his life. He told me she had never been able to deny him anything. It may well be true; and herein I detect the seeds of that habit of reckless expenditure which proved to be his undoing. Certainly her death must have given him a twist that never passed off; a twist reflected in his very face which, in unguarded moments, took on as sad an expression as I have seen on any human countenance; a twist that threw him into the arms of the Roman Catholic Church and accounted for sundry other dichotomies in his nature. So Lawrence notes his brusque and offhand manner, interpreting it into commonness. It was not commonness; it was a sensitive man's mask, his armour, his defence against the world. He was, without a doubt, far too fastidious in many ways, though naturally, like all persons of sound health, not inaccessible to coarser impulses at times.

Ane thank God for that; else—whisky or no whisky—I should soon have dropped his acquaintance.

DREGS, then, was being written during the autumn of 1917 and I collaborated as best I could, and would have gone on collaborating to the end but for the fact that in October, just before the Italian defeat of Caporetto, I got into some kind of trouble myself and had to hop over the frontier. The text was different from what it now is; it contained many allusions, expunged later on, to certain ultra-masculine peculiarities of legionary life upon which I shall not expatiate here. Me they amused, these little incidents; they struck me as a natural result of local conditions; but their bestial promiscuity and utter lack of idealism horrified the fastidious Magnus more than any of his other unpleasant experiences out there; they made him sick—sick not in the American and Biblical, but in the English sense of the word: ready to vomit. Yet he put it all down with names and dates and places. Often I told him he would never get any one to print this stuff, interesting as it was from a sociological point of view (and,

as a matter of fact, he showed the manuscript later in that crude state to a well-known London publisher who, after his death, remembered having seen it and wrote to me: "If you, as his literary executor, would allow the book to be expurgated, it might come out," and again nearly a year later (26 January, 1922) "How are you going to make it printable? When you have taken out the unprintable stuff there won't be a great deal left except the exciting escape from France.")

Well, it has been expurgated thoroughly now—too thoroughly for my taste; a hint or two might have been left in for the guidance of the initiated. Strange, on the face of it, that Magnus should have been so averse to expunging this obnoxious material; the reason was that he had suffered so much in the Legion, and detested it so intensely, that he meant to show it up in all its crudity. I had to return to the attack over and over again; the last time on the very day when I left for France.

"I've given chapter and verse," he then replied, as usual. "I've just tried to tell the truth."

"You have succeeded. But truth is like that whisky of yours: not to be taken neat without disastrous consequences. You want to sell the book, don't you? No publisher would

touch it with tongs as it stands. Water your truth! The reader likes to think that the legionaries, for all their roughness, are brave men ready to die for their country, and not a cosmopolitan pack of cut-throats and sharpers and sodomites."

He reflected awhile and then said regretfully, as he had often said before:

"All right. I suppose I shall have to tone it down. And when I find a publisher?"

"Sell him the copyright if you can get a reasonable price for it. That will save you endless trouble."

The following May, while at S. Malo, I was surprised to receive this official letter from him:

Rome, May 12, 1918.

Dear Norman Douglas,

In accordance with our conversation I herewith confirm that I am willing to dispose of the copyright of "DREGS" for L.st. 150 (one hundred and fifty pounds) for America—and L.st. 150 (one hundred and fifty pounds) for Great Britain and Ireland and Colonies—in all L.st. 300 (three hundred pounds). It is understood that half the money for each country is to be paid to me at the signing of the contract and the other half to be at your entire disposal.

Yours faithfully MAURICE MAGNUS.

I wrote to ask what he meant by sending me a letter of this kind. He replied "You just keep it" or words to that effect; I therefore kept it.

It stands to reason that while writing DREGS he also wrote dozens of other things, as befitted that portentous American vitality of his, although the *Roman Review*, which he was editing up to that time, had unfortunately expired in consequence of the war. It was characteristic of Maurice that in order to be able to work at it without distractions, he had set up its offices in the village of Monte Celio, a horrible little hill-top place near the Rome-Tivoli line where they still remember him with affection (ask the tobacconist). Monte Celio, by the way, gave him the idea for his book-plate which represents the scattered houses and old ruined castle of that place enclosed in an oval (ogival, rather) frame with the Benedictine motto: *Laborare est orare: Maurice Magnus*. This Roman Review was one of several such undertakings; in Berlin, for instance, he set up a "European Literary Bureau" which seems to have done well so long as he was personally in charge of it. He wrote with great ease, but though the subjects he chose were always suggestive, his style was bald and undistinguished; and therefore, in my

opinion, singularly adapted for a narrative like these Foreign Legion Memoirs, where every kind of literary artifice would have been out of place. To the very end he continued to bombard editors and agencies on both sides of the Atlantic with these things. Where are they now? I possess nothing of his save "The future social order of Western Civilization" and three long chapters of what was going to be an important book entitled "Memoirs of Golden Russia." Those I have deal with St. Petersburg, the Crimea and the "Heart of Russia"; another, on the Caucasus, which I have never seen, was also finished; others which he had in preparation described Poland, Finland, and "Three years after." I shall be glad to hand my three to any editor who cares to print them. Few foreigners knew Russia as well as he did; he spoke the language fairly well, and whenever he had occasion to write me a postcard he always spelt the English words in Russian characters.

Altogether he was a far more civilized and multi-faceted person than the reader of Lawrence's Introduction might be led to expect. He made researches at the Goethe-Archiv in Weimar on several occasions. I also remember once asking him to write down for me what was worth seeing in Florence besides those

monuments and galleries which the unfortunate tourist cannot help seeing. He happened to dislike Florence but, for all that, had made it his business to do the place thoroughly and at once sat down to indite a formidable list of convents, out-of-the-way palaces and private houses where this or that could be seen—many of which I have not heard of to this day, and hope to live long enough never to inspect.

The last things he wrote were “Vignettes of Malta”: he was engaged on them at the time of his suicide. I should like to see these Vignettes; they are probably deposited in that *one old leather suit-case* above-mentioned. During this final and sad period he was straining every nerve to get out of debt; in his last letter to me—a letter which bears the Malta postmark of the 4 November, the very day of his death—he wrote: “How can one continue to live like this? I have sixty manuscripts out (including translations), at least half of them accepted, and not one paid. This is irrespective of the stuff I am doing now.” Surely a pathetic state of affairs! And here I must quote a few words from p. 92 of Lawrence’s Introduction, if only to show how biography ought not to be written. Says Lawrence:

“Now would you believe it, that little scamp M—spent over a hundred pounds of borrowed

money during his four months in Malta, when his expenses, he boasted to me, need not have been more than a pound a week, once he got into the little house at Notabile. That is, he spent at least seventy pounds too much. Heaven knows what he did with it, apart from “guzzling”....”

The truth is that he did not spend over a hundred pounds of borrowed money; he never borrowed a hundred; apart from what he got from Lawrence, who has now recouped himself many times over by the sale of these Memoirs, he borrowed fifty-five: neither more nor less. There lies before me an official statement of account drawn up by his Consul and entitled “Debts of the Estate of the late M. Magnus.” From this document it appears that the total of his debts was L.st. 77-16-11 $\frac{3}{4}$; this total includes not only those fifty-five and all his outstanding tradesmen’s bills, but also the sum of L.st. 7-19-4 which was due to the Consul for expenses in connection with Maurice’s *funeral*. As to spending seventy pounds too much, presumably on “guzzling”—he wrote me himself that the typing of his innumerable articles cost him more than did his food, which consisted for the most part of “rice and eggs, bread and tea.” I have also a letter from the gentleman whom Lawrence calls Mr. Mazzaiba

who was in daily contact with Maurice and, as his creditor for the fifty-five pounds, hardly disposed to say flattering things about him, since he never expected to get his money back. Well, this gentleman wrote me one month after the suicide (4 December, 1920) that Maurice had "lived here in a very retired and economical way." *Great is the power of misrepresentation*, as even the sweet-natured Darwin once complained. But of course the whole thing is sheer bunkum: the novelist's touch.

There reaches me at this moment a copy of the London *Spectator* of 13 December. It contains the following letter on which I shall make no comment beyond saying that it appears the writer of it had not read Lawrence's Introduction but only a review of it; that there seems to be something wrong with the last sentence, and that I hope to be forgiven for reprinting without permission.

Sir,

From England, six thousand miles away, the *Spectator* (always welcome) of October 18 has just arrived. In the "Literary Suppt." there is a commentary on *M. M's Memoirs of the Foreign Legion*, edited by Mr. D. H. Law-

rence, headed "The Little Gentleman Enlists." While either I or my husband live, M. M. is not without a friend in this world to put in a good word for him; and I hope this necessarily belated word may find space in your paper. M. M. was a dear friend of mine, and, as I knew him in Italy, "a very parfy^t gentil knight;" generous, super-sensitive—not very practical. His friends I did not meet. If Mr. Lawrence is a specimen he was unfortunate in them. Cannot that superior person, so anxious to cast stones of old grudges at his unresisting dead friend, so willing to enhance his own literary reputation, and damn his friend's, by turning sarcastic phrases at his expense, imagine what a man of M. M.'s temperament suffered in those three months? He described them to me as "Hell." Many whose military record stands deservedly high, who may even wear decorations, did not, I'll wager, endure a tithe of the agony and humiliation which he endured; some might not have been able to.

M. M. lived for beauty, harmony, peace. An American citizen, he never felt at home in the hustling Republic. Italy was the land of his adoption, of his heart, of his religion. He had been brought up mainly by women, to his disadvantage; and perhaps only a woman could fully understand, and so forgive, the

seeming lack of courage on which we are apt to be hardest. He repudiated with passion his German blood. Long before the War, the Slav in him (Polish, I think) shuddered away from the coarseness, and what he called the lack of civilization in the German mentality. He was writing on this very theme when the War caught him unawares. Domestic tragedy arising out of the War led him to make the ghastly mistake of enlisting in the Foreign Legion. No one who knew him could imagine that he could "stick" that particular ordeal, for which life had in no way prepared him. Yet he faced it, for a quarrel not his own, with a like chivalry that enabled him to nurse an invalid mother for years as tenderly as any daughter. That he failed is surely rather matter for "pity and terror" than for cheap gibes.

If he left "victims" whom he had "defrauded" I refuse to believe he defaulted willingly. Indeed, he wrote to us in anguish about the struggle he was making to meet his liabilities. He thought he had found an asylum in Malta where he could take breath and retrieve his losses. But it seems not. At the last, as he told an American friend, he "could not face an Italian prison." Poor M. M. "What (he) aspired to be, and was not, comforts me." For him "the high" indeed "proved too high;"

“the heroic for earth too hard,” but these he was “worth to God,” and to his sorrowing, remembering, understanding friends, one of whom I am proud to subscribe myself.

I am, Sir, etc.

Irene M. Ashby Macfadyen.

King William’s Town, Cape Province

South Africa

I spoke just now of the novelist’s touch in biography. What is this touch? It consists, I should say, in a failure to realize the profundities and complexities of the ordinary human mind; it selects for literary purposes two or three facets of a man or woman, generally the most spectacular and therefore “useful” ingredients of their character, and disregards all the others. Whatever fails to fit in with these specially chosen traits is eliminated; must be eliminated, for otherwise the description would not hold water. Such and such are the data; everything incompatible with those data has to go by the board. It follows that the novelist’s touch argues, often logically, from a wrong premise; it takes what it likes and leaves the rest. The facts may be correct so far as they go, but there are too few of them; what the author says may be

true, and yet by no means the truth. That is the novelist's touch. It falsifies life.

In Lawrence's Introduction, for example, I am described as a blustering railer of the old school; it would plainly never befit such a personage to feel anything but contempt for an "effeminate little bounder" as Magnus is described; I am therefore made to *despise* him. I have already explained what the truth of this matter was. Again, Magnus most unfortunately borrowed money from Lawrence (and the reader, by the way, will not be long in discovering that those borrowed pounds are the key to this whole feline Introduction). Now let us try to be fair to my young friend; it is so easy to be unfair! No doubt it hurts, to part with money to a person whom one does not care for and who will presumably never pay it back—especially when one has none to spare oneself; it is enough to enrage any one—especially friend Lawrence who (page 24) upholds the fine middle-class tradition to "keep a few pounds between himself and the world." Yes; no doubt it hurts, and no doubt Maurice was a sponger on that occasion. I should not have taken it amiss, accordingly, if Lawrence had vented his wrath more viciously than he does over this particular business, since it would only prove what a sage person said to

me long ago: "There are some people from whom it is unsafe to borrow money." Our friend, however, is not satisfied with voicing his personal grievance; those borrowed pounds have caused him to give to posterity an entirely false portrait of Magnus as a whole; he passes from the particular to the general and so furnishes an admirable illustration of the novelist's touch. On page 82 you will find him writing, as if he had known Magnus all his life, that he *traded on the tenderness of others*; that "God knows how much warm kindness, generosity, was showered on him during the course of his forty-odd years. And selfish little scamp, he took it as a greedy boy takes cakes off a dish, etc."

Rubbish. I wish Lawrence could have met him during one of his many rich moments; he would have had another tale to unfold. And I wish the Recording Angel could be induced to flutter down for five minutes or so and open that note-book of his and tell us exactly how often Maurice sponged on his friends, and how often they sponged on him. . . .

Poor biographers, these romance-writers; and poor psychologists. That is because they work on the *Leit-motif* system, which gives fallacious results when applied to a delicate structure like the human mind. A little intuition

would have convinced anybody but a novelist-creditor that Magnus was too generous for this world ; that his giving capacities far surpassed his borrowing ones ; that if he was sometimes without means it was only because he had spent them on friends and strangers and not on himself, as a relatively poor man ought to have done ; that he was one of those people who are never happy, never quite happy, unless they are obliging others—for which, of course, they get the devil's thanks. Thomas à Kempis, or some other neurotic, had given him a firm belief in the comfortable but preposterous fiction of the perfectibility of mankind ; he therefore went out of his way, over and over again, to return good for evil and, do what I would, I never succeeded in causing him to excrete this particular virus. Now I will not go so far as to say that a certain proportion of our fellow-creatures may not be amenable to such kind treatment ; but their numbers are so inconsiderable, so lamentably small that I, for my part, have long ceased looking for them. Not so Magnus. He looked for them. He was determined to do good whenever possible.

There is in Florence a certain tavern known as the “Café delle C—e” which at night-time becomes, or became, a sinister place—the

haunt of pimps and every other kind of *louche* and dubious character. Thither we used to resort after dinner, to study types; and one evening, I remember, Maurice was attracted by an ancient man at the other end of the room, poorly dressed and sipping his coffee with trembling hands. He could not take his eyes off him.

“ You see him?” he asked. “ Looks as if he had been through Hell, doesn’t he? And at least seventy years old, I should say. He won’t last much longer. Poor old boy, I’ll bet he only came in here on account of the warmth.”

“ Very likely.”

After a while he began again :

“ I just can’t stand that unhappy face. I’m going to give him every cent I have in this pocket; it’s only eight or nine francs—” and he got up from the table. I pulled him back.

“ Not in here,” I said. “ We shall be taken for millionaires and waylaid on the road before we get home. You must do it outside.”

There we waited. Our coffee-drinker never moved; he was enjoying the warmth. And time went by. I grew sleepy and grumpy, yearning to go to bed, and did my best to make Maurice change his mind. He refused to budge. At last, after about two hours, the

place was closed and we were all driven out including our man, who went off in a direction different to our own. We followed him for twenty paces or so and then Maurice, with a single word "Permettete," slipped the money into his hand and turned back before the old fellow had time to recover from his surprise. How many of my readers would have acted thus? Would friend Lawrence have done so? And this is the man of whom he writes that he had "no bowels of deep compassion or kindness."

In this case the money may have been well spent; in others he certainly erred on the side of generosity. We knew a vile creature in Rome whom Magnus one day insisted upon inviting to luncheon, for no reason whatever. Why not, he said?

"That slimy abortion?" I asked. "Don't invite him to luncheon. Stamp on him."

"Ah," he said, "but one must be kind to these people. If you only knew what he's been through—"

"And richly deserved it; with that face of his. Stamp on him. He'll do you a bad turn whenever he gets a chance."

Prophetic utterance.... It was precisely this reptile who through the indiscreet confidences of a friend was enabled to put the

Italian police on his tracks, first at the monastery mentioned by Laurence, and then in Malta; and so led to his suicide. It is to be hoped that somebody has stamped on him by this time. He ought to be pounded into such a jelly that his own mother would have difficulty in recognizing the remains.

Now what, one may ask—what made the loathsome creature act as he did? Nothing but malice; natural malice; an excess of biliary secretion indirectly due, I fancy, to that pestilential system of repression which of late has invaded every department of life. I can find no other explanation for the deplorable fact that so many people seem nowadays to live in a chronic state of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness. Be my theory of its origin correct or not, this exacerbation is indubitably a recent phenomenon; and not an attractive one. “The modern temper,” writes a lady, “cannot respect, cannot appreciate, cannot love, (cannot laugh, she might have added), but it can hate.” True! And how hateful is this hate!

It is astonishing that Lawrence never noticed this streak of unworldliness in Magnus; it would be astonishing, that is, but for the fact that he happens to belong to that literary class which refuses to see more than two or three

aspects of their fellow-creatures. He had made up his mind that Maurice was to be classed as a sponger; the quality of unworldliness being inconsistent with such a character must therefore be wiped out of the portrait. And out it goes....

What children, what innocents are these writing gentlemen beside the family doctor or solicitor who lack their petty pictorial sense and the obligation to tickle a certain class of fool-readers; who make it their business to see mankind as a whole and therefore possess more psychology and penetration in their little finger than your average novelist in his whole inflated organism! Go to those others for amusement if you like, and if you think you can find it there; not for knowledge of human nature.

I have heard the late Joseph Conrad called a great psychologist, and that is a good example for my purpose. Well, Conrad was first and foremost a Pole and, like many Poles, a politician and a moralist *malgré lui*. These are his fundamentals. He was also a great writer with hardly an ounce of psychology in his composition. His genius is the reverse of the psychologist's; it consists in driving you along by main force; in making characters work out their salvation according to the

approved principles not of psychology but of British morality, of the "right thing to do." Such was his implicit teaching: the "right thing to do." Everything that deviated from this precarious standard was anathema to him; so much anathema that even the harmless failing of his friend Stephen Crane is politely slurred over. He seldom explored the human heart, that wonderful tangle of motives pure and impure (as they are called)—which was a pity, for he might have picked up some humour as he went along; he never so much as glanced into its depths lest he should discover, down in those muddy recesses, something rotten, something which had no right to be there. Can a man who lacks sympathy with erring humanity give us a convincing picture of it? He can give us no more than what Conrad gave: a convincing proof of how much may be accomplished without psychology.*

* Let me mention a person who possessed the real psychologist's gift: Maurice Magnus. That letter of his already referred to, that last letter, that letter which bears the postmark of the day of his suicide, contains—as if in anticipation of the treatment that was to be meted out to him in Lawrence's Introduction—a diagnosis of Lawrence so kindly and yet searching that no doctor or lawyer could have made a better job of it. Of course it is unprintable, as is nearly everything serious that one might try to write about Lawrence: I can quote only a few words. "He revels in all that is not just within his reach. He wants it to be

And if this be true of an imposing figure like his, how about the smaller fry? I pick up an ordinary novel now and then, and ask myself whether we shall go on reading this flatulent balderdash much longer. I hope not. For what is the ordinary novel but a string of foregone conclusions; a barrel-organ wound up to play one particular tune? Any hall porter, any genuine *homo sapiens* with all his little caprices and contradictions, blundering by chance into the entrails of this pitiful mechanism, forthwith puts the whole machine out of order. Life would indeed be a bore, if constructed on the lines of the ordinary novel. And biography, the record of life, would become a despicable farce if enlivened or rather infected, as in this case, with that pernicious novelist's touch which menaces the living, wrongs the dead, and degrades a decent literary calling to the level of the chatter at an old maids' tea-party.

It menaces the living. It adds a new terror to life; to the lives, at least, of those who are not blest with the hide of a rhinoceros.

within his reach. Arrived too late—regrets it. Never speaks of it unless bored to tears by women, as here by Mrs. G—C—and his wife." Is not that the man in a nutshell?

Here is friend Lawrence, in a earlier book, dragging me in again together with a number of my friends—and really, are we as interesting as all that? Can modern writers describe only people they know? Are they too lazy or too stupid to create a character of their own?—me, under the transparent disguise of Jimmie Mc Taggart or something equally Scotch (I have not the book here) with the same *Leitmotif* as in this Introduction but not so cleverly done; the same high-handed old swaggerer, rather unsteady on his legs, and giving utterance to opinions which are quite in harmony with this romantic figure but which, as a matter of fact, have never yet entered my head. And here I must delay a moment, to draw attention to what seems an urgent question of literary etiquette. If Lawrence had caused me to discuss William Shakespeare or Mr. Gladstone he might have let me say what he pleased; my imaginary views on these subjects, however fantastic, could have done no possible harm to anybody. But he has pictured me as commenting on certain living personal friends of mine who also appear in the book, and has put into my mouth some uncomplimentary and spiteful observations about them which—consistent as they may be with his portrait of me—I never dreamt of uttering and which, as he cannot

but have foreseen, have given a little pain to the persons concerned. Is this fair? I think not. I call it something more than the novelist's touch; it is hitting below the belt, and a damnably vulgar proceeding. There was no reason why he should annoy people who, while he was in the place, fed him to bursting-point and went out of their way to show him every civility in their power. Such, alas, is friend Lawrence who is fond of introducing familiars in this playful fashion (with results which are sometimes peculiarly disastrous to himself) and whose behaviour, for the rest, is symptomatic; he has only caught the tone of the times, seeing that an entire school has grown up which lives, and thrives, on writing up other people in books and newspapers.

Now this personality-mongering is a nuisance which has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished. It is not only bad literature but bad breeding. You can hardly pick up any volume by a member of this school without finding therein caricatures of some acquaintance —all unfavourably drawn and derided not with frank wit or invective or mockery or Rabelaisean laughter, but with that squeaky suburban chuckle which is characteristic of an age of eunuchs. And if they are momentarily at a loss for friends to distort, they indulge

in airing their own private sensations—a mild form of exhibitionism—with a shamelessness that reminds one of nothing so much as a female dog. Questionable taste! It seems to me that even such a writing man should have some manners, some reserve, though his mentality be of the non-human order and his ethos immeasurably inferior to that of the butcher or grocer; that if he cannot respect his neighbours, he ought at least to respect himself. But he has forgotten what self-respect means; everything is grist to his mill—including himself; he chronicles your postprandial effusions as rapturously and scrupulously as he chronicles his own nocturnal emissions and it is no use appealing to his better nature, since he has no nature at all; he is a *cloaca maxima* for the discharge of objectionable personalities.

The ridiculous compilation known as "Who's Who" has done a good deal towards fostering this unhealthy interest in the affairs of other people. That Sir Edmund Gosse happens to write good books is no reason why the public should be informed how much he pays his scullery-maid; and what on earth does it matter to any one, save himself and his friends, what his favourite indoor amusements are—whether he prefers bridge to baccarat, or fornication to dominoes? Vastly offensive, this prying and

rapacious meddlesomeness. But I fear we shall never have a revulsion of feeling against such snobbishly genteel hankerings. They are part of that universal levelling-down process for which the education-of-people-who-ought-never-to-be-educated is responsible.

I received not long ago a copy of a well-known Jewish monthly from America wherein, to my surprise, I discovered an "Imaginary Conversation" between myself and the author, a young Jewish friend of mine, on the subject of "Judaism and Paganism"; he supporting the Jewish point of view and I the other. Now it strikes me that a man who has written "Far be it from me to disparage the tribe of Israel. I have gained the conviction—firm-fixed, now, as the Polar Star—that the Hebrew is as good a man as the Christian—" it strikes me that such a man can hardly be put forward as a representative Jew-baiter. Could he not have found somebody more qualified for the post; Mr. Belloc, for instance? He might with some plausibility have introduced me as anti-Christian... But I shall not wrangle over the religious aspects of the matter; they are not worth wrangling about, since Christians are only an anaemic variety of Jews. It is the principle involved which concerns me. There ought to be a limit to this kind of thing; the

limit being that a writer, before displaying you in a wholly fictitious character and putting into your mouth arguments which, whether sound or not, have never yet occurred to you, should at least be good enough to ask your permission first. Only a little fun, of course. My young friend meant no harm ; he probably thought that in proclaiming me across the length and breadth of a continent as an anti-Semite and himself as a Semite he was *giving the old dodderer a lift-up*—and himself another one. Well, we may all be vainer than we think and still ready to dispense with this form of advertisement. Not that I am annoyed personally, having long ago convinced myself of the truth of Sheridan's saying that no man was written down except by himself, but there is this to be considered: like others, I have excellent Jewish friends over there ; Jews are more sensitive than they look and one or the other of them, if he comes across this article, may think that it throws a new light on my sentiments towards his race, and be justifiably sore about it. No matter. *Il faut avaler son crapaud*, as Zola used to say.

This was just a friendly joke ; it is otherwise with many of the things I have lately read which verge, and often trespass, on the libellous—if one could bring oneself to take their authors

at their own valuation. Certainly it is an anomalous state of affairs that respectable folk should be at the mercy of a band of dirt-throwers who are coining money at their expense; it suggests that in such matters of literary ethics we might do worse than return to the more gentlemanlike standard of the Victorians, though we shall obviously never have real manners, either in literature or in society, until duelling becomes popular again. Duelling would soon put an end to these caddish arts and to several other inconveniences as well; there would be no more low-class allusions to living people in novels or newspapers or memoirs if their authors realised that by next morning they might have half a yard of cold steel in their gizzards.

Meanwhile it is not an exhilarating spectacle: this confraternity of cats—among whom many people, I fear, will include friend Lawrence, if not on account of this performance then on account of others—industriously scribbling down, with more or less untruthfulness, the imperfections of their fellow-creatures; and the literary historian of the future, dipping into these outpourings and casting about for a word that shall summarise the flabby activities of the whole tribe, may well find himself at fault. I think he will end in calling it the school of

cerebral hermaphrodites. Sexlessness is its basic note. How one yearns for a Pope to laugh their monkey-tricks out of existence, or for a Byron to disembowel these epicene babblers and wipe the floor with what is left of them! Byron, needless to say, is out of fashion in those virginal circles. He happened to be a man. . . .

Maybe friend Lawrence, should he read what has gone before, will think it is pointed straight at himself, whereas he is only the *causa causans*. That cannot be helped. He has undoubtedly made a spleenful hash of Maurice Magnus, but we can none of us transcend the boundaries of our own natures; he is an impulsive, elvish mortal who writes whatever comes into his head, and hates being pestered for money by bounders. Once we have grasped these initial facts, we know our position; we are prepared for the worst.

We get it. On p. 85, for instance, he achieves as fine a specimen of malicious rhetoric as you may come across in a week of Sundays; mere rant, in fact, when one considers the circumstances which were just these: Maurice Magnus, like others, caught the war-fever. After applying vainly for all kinds of jobs

(*see* p. 101; and these applications were authentic, for I have read them and the replies to them) he committed the nightmarish blunder of enlisting in the Foreign Legion where a natural refinement in habits and manners and language intensified his sufferings a thousandfold. What he thought of this Legion is set down in the few temperate pages constituting Chapters 6 and 17 which bear the hall-mark of veracity, and which I warmly commend to my readers together with the words, so full of restraint, at the bottom of p. 240 “For I knew there was a limit to how long I could keep sane etc.” And as if one could expect a German-American-Jew or, for that matter, any other sensible person, to feel strongly on the subject of nationality! One may dislike individuals; to dislike an entire nation is a feat of which only fools are capable. Now Maurice, whatever his failings, was no fool. He wrote me himself: “I agree with Tim Edwards that some people have no nationality. I am sure I have not”. Though his opinion of German culture was fairly pronounced (*see* p. 245) he was no more anti-German than anti-Chinese; he detested oppression in every shape or form. That is why he loathed German brutality and insolence; why he sympathised with French soldiers huddled together like

cattle in a train ; why it made his " blood boil " to see how poor Arabs were treated by the officials. . . .

Such was Maurice who could not bear cruel dealing between man and man, and was therefore not long in discovering that the Foreign Legion did not suit his temperament. To escape out of that Hell was an undertaking full of danger ; one single false step would have been his ruin ; it called for a rare alloy of cunning and grit—grit of an uncommon kind. Finally, after mature preparation, he burnt all his papers and walked out of the trap as unconcernedly as Napoleon walked out of the fortress of Ham ; with this difference, that the consequences of re-capture would have certainly been more serious for Maurice. He strolled into Italy, and was safe.

On a later occasion, but still in troubled times, he strolled into France again.

One morning at Mentone, just as I was finishing my breakfast, he turned up unexpectedly, more spick and span than ever, informed me that he had no passport or papers of any kind but, having just received a biggish cheque, could not resist the temptation of

trying his luck at Monte Carlo again after all those years. Knowing how conscientiously the frontier was guarded, I asked how he had done the trick and how he now proposed to manage at Mentone with that pathologically suspicious *commissaire de police*, whom I knew only too well.

He had stayed a day or two at Ventimiglia, he explained; made friends with a fisherman and finally induced him to row him over at dead of night and deposit him with his bag on the Mentone beach. There he had waited under a boulder till dawn came, then gone as usual to the most expensive hotel and enjoyed a bath, shave, change of apparel and breakfast. He must, he simply must, have a flutter at the tables—just a little one. And as he could not stay three hours at a hotel without producing a *carte d'identité*, would I persuade my landlord to give him a room somewhere near my quarters? I did; but it cost some trouble.

Luck was against him at the Casino.

“Never mind,” he said. “I know the whole history of Monaco and Monte Carlo. I’ll write an article about the place to recoup myself. I’ve bought the photographs already.”

He wrote that article (I typing it) in one day and sent it to some monthly in the Middle West; with what results I cannot tell. But this

ought to be noted: a man who can write three articles a week and have two or even one of them accepted is not making a bad income. It was different, however, during that particular period when nobody wanted such literature, and this accounts to a large extent for the difficulties in which he latterly found himself.

Meanwhile my landlord had grown so restive about this possible spy in his house that Maurice decided Mentone was no longer the place for him. He wrote to his fisherman at Ventimiglia.

“I’ve told him,” he said, “to fetch me next Tuesday on the esplanade at half past one in the morning. He’s sure to turn up! But we must be sitting there a good deal earlier, so as not to attract attention.”

We were on our bench by midnight. It was pitch-dark and rather windy, and I thought that for once he had miscalculated his man, for at 1.15 no boat was yet in sight. Suddenly it appeared with four oarsmen moving not along the shore but from straight out at sea; he jumped on board before it touched land; I threw his bag after him; the operation took half a minute.

“Hi! Your cane!” I called out. I found I was still holding it in my hand, to allow him to jump in more easily.

“Damn my cane!”

They were already out of reach.

This little trip to Mentone, I should imagine, was an epitome of Maurice's whole life.

Finally he went over to Malta and worked like a nigger to straighten out his affairs again. While so doing, that foul creature in Rome whom I have mentioned set the Italian police on his tracks with a view to having him extradited for a certain debt incurred in Italy. If he had only told me the complete truth! But he was always shy about disclosing his troubles to me; he had a strange reluctance to give me any kind of pain or even preoccupation. I knew he was hard up; had I known of this particular Italian embarrassment, I should have recommended him to go not to Malta but to Corfu, where he could have worked to his heart's content without fear of being interrupted by bailiffs and detectives. So useful it is to know a smattering of the laws of the countries you inhabit; so much more useful than knowing their languages....

Anyhow, they pounced on him at Malta and, in a moment of supreme weakness, he killed himself rather than fall into their hands. That

he was able to face the horrors of life among the unspeakable riff-raff of the Legion, and yet unable to face the slight inconvenience of appearing in an Italian court on a charge of fraud and perhaps doing a month or two, is to me an almost inexplicable phenomenon. I suppose he had a queer sense of honour packed away somewhere, whatever his enemies may say. And, besides that, he must have been utterly run down in stamina and health; else where was his grit gone? I am not in the habit of making debts; I lack the resourceful vitality necessary for evading creditors and prefer to spend what energies I have in the pursuit of other objects; but if I had been in Maurice's place on that occasion, I should have acted differently. Fancy poisoning yourself because you owe a little money to a brigand—a notorious brigand, too—of a continental hotel-keeper! Maurice ought to have faced the music, and then blackmailed him for the rest of his life.

Previously to this, however, he had borrowed fifty-five pounds from his Maltese friend Mr. Mazzaiba, and this financial transaction gives Lawrence an opportunity for a grand pyrotechnical display of sympathy for the poor deluded victim, Mr. Mazzaiba. Poor Mr. Mazzaiba! Now why is Lawrence so terribly

vexed because a certain bounder owes money to a third party and has the impudence to kill himself before paying it back? There is more than meets the eye here. A little overdone, this pity for Mr. Mazzaiba; it does not ring quite true. Whether it be not a vicarious, unconfessed pity for himself? That is probably where the shoe pinches. He is not so much worried about poor Mr. Mazzaiba's misfortune as about his own. Or should we have been treated to this flare-up of virtuous indignation unless Lawrence had also lost a pound or two? I wonder! Not that I would be construed as saying he is guilty of deliberate simulation here; so far as I have observed, he never simulates; his method is to work himself up to a state of wrong feeling and then let fly in a needlessly shrill tone of voice. This whole Introduction is an example of the process. It is wrong feeling nearly all the way through; wrongly bitter; a touch of Maurice's humanity would do our friend no harm. Which reminds me that the writer of the *Outlook* article, from whom I quoted at the beginning, seems to have made a mistake when he says he is assured that Lawrence has "contrived to exalt himself at the expense of the dead Maurice Magnus." At least, that is not how I should put it. I think a careful study of this Introduction will convince

most readers that my young friend has not exalted himself to any great extent; that on the contrary, in exposing the frailties of Maurice Magnus he has contrived, like a true Boswell, to expose his own.

Be that as it may, it is worth noting that Mr. Mazzaiba himself, the long-suffering creditor for those fifty-five pounds, must have taken another and most singular view of this "Judas treachery," as Lawrence calls it. Despite his grievance against Maurice, he went to the expense of having his remains moved from the public grave at Malta and interred in his own burial-place; which says a good deal for both of them and proves, among other things, that some people can still be trusted to behave like gentlemen.

And there he now lies, the poor devil; unconcerned about bailiffs—and biographers. *Requiescat.* Lawrence calls him an outsider: it is the mildest of some fifteen pretty names he bestows on him. An outsider. So be it. I wish we had a few more such outsiders on earth.

Syracuse,

24 December, 1924.

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